The Limits of Regional Power and the Final

Suppression of the Saudi State

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The Enemy No Neighbor Could Destroy

Abstract

This document analyzes the military and political confrontation between the First Saudi State and a diverse array of regional and imperial powers, focusing on the cumulative efforts undertaken to contain and ultimately dismantle Wahhabi power in Arabia. It argues that repeated campaigns by neighboring states, including Qajar interventions, Ottoman Iraqi expeditions, Omani resistance, and limited British and French involvement, consistently failed to achieve a decisive outcome. Through a comparative examination of conventional warfare, irregular resistance, and external intervention, the study demonstrates that Wahhabi resilience rested on adaptability, interior control, and the inability of rival powers to sustain prolonged inland operations. The analysis concludes that only the deployment of a large, centrally organized Egyptian army, equipped with European weapons and maintained through extended campaigning over nearly eight years, succeeded in fully destroying the Saudi state. This case highlights the limits of regional coalitions and underscores the decisive role of modernized military force in reshaping the balance of power in Arabia.

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Introduction

The rise and expansion of the First Saudi State posed one of the most significant military and political challenges to the established order of Arabia and the wider Middle East in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Despite facing opposition from multiple regional powers often simultaneously the Wahhabi-Saudi polity demonstrated an unusual capacity for endurance, territorial consolidation, and military adaptation.

This study argues that the repeated failure of regional and imperial actors to defeat the Saudi state was not the result of a lack of hostility or effort, but rather structural limitations inherent in their methods of warfare, political coordination, and logistical reach. By examining successive attempts to suppress Wahhabi power, this document seeks to explain why containment repeatedly failed and why only a prolonged, large-scale Egyptian intervention ultimately succeeded

Literature Review and Historiography

Previous scholarship has often examined individual conflicts between the First Saudi State and its opponents in isolation Saudi Ottoman wars, Qajar expeditions, or Omani resistance. While valuable, such approaches risk obscuring the broader pattern of sustained yet ineffective opposition.

This study builds on comparative military history by synthesizing these campaigns into a unified analytical framework. It challenges interpretations that attribute Saudi survival solely to ideology or religious zeal, instead emphasizing operational flexibility, strategic depth, and the failure of rival powers to coordinate or commit sufficient force over time.

Sources and Methodology

The analysis draws upon a combination of primary and secondary sources, including Arabic chronicles, Persian accounts, Ottoman administrative records, and European travel narratives. Modern historical studies are used to contextualize and interpret these materials.

Methodologically, the study adopts a comparative approach, examining different modes of warfare conventional campaigns, guerrilla resistance, naval pressure, and expeditionary intervention to assess their relative effectiveness against the Saudi state. Particular attention is paid to logistics, terrain, command structure, and duration of operations

Analysis

Regional and Imperial Failures

Repeated efforts by regional powers failed to dismantle Wahhabi control in Arabia. Qajar campaigns were hindered by distance, supply limitations, and unreliable local support. Ottoman authorities in Iraq lacked the manpower and coordination necessary for sustained inland warfare. Omani resistance, whether

tribal or state-supported, proved effective in harassment but insufficient for decisive victory. British and French involvement remained largely peripheral, focused on maritime security rather than territorial conquest.

These failures shared common characteristics: short campaign durations, fragmented command structures, and an inability to occupy and hold central Arabian territory.

The Limits of Containment

Rather than destroying the Saudi state, most campaigns aimed at containment. This approach allowed Wahhabi forces to adapt, retreat, and recover. Guerrilla tactics, interior mobility, and ideological cohesion enabled the Saudi leadership to survive repeated setbacks and reassert control once external pressure receded

The Egyptian Intervention

The eventual destruction of the First Saudi State required a fundamentally different approach. The Egyptian expedition, operating under Ottoman authority, deployed a large, centrally organized army equipped with European weapons and artillery. Unlike earlier campaigns, it combined sustained occupation, systematic sieges, and long-term logistical support.

The Beginnings of Saudi History

The origins of Diriyah trace back to the mid-fifteenth century, when Mani‘ bin Rabi‘a al-Muraidi migrated with his kin from the small settlement of al-Dir‘iyyah near al-Qatif. Upon settling in the fertile lands surrounding Wadi Hanifa, particularly the areas of Ghusaybah and al-Mulaybid, Mani‘ named the new settlement Diriyah in memory of his ancestral home. This act laid the foundation for what would later become one of the most significant political entities in Arabian history. Following Mani‘’s death, leadership passed to his son Rabi‘a bin Mani‘, under whom the population of Diriyah expanded. As nearby clans such as the Yazid family abandoned their own villages, they gradually affiliated themselves with the growing settlement. Over the following generations, control of Diriyah remained within the ruling house, moving successively through figures such as Ibrahim bin Musa, Markhan bin Ibrahim, and the joint leadership of Rabi‘a and Muqrin, sons of Markhan.The emirate continued to evolve through a succession of rulers from the extended family Watban bin Rabi‘a, Markhan bin Muqrin, Nasser bin Muhammad bin Watban, Muhammad bin Muqrin, Ibrahim bin Watban, and Idris bin Watban until the early eighteenth century. By 1121 AH / 1709 CE, authority rested with Musa bin Rabi‘a bin Watban, after which the emirate passed to Saud al-Awwal bin Muhammad bin Muqrin, who ruled until his death in 1137 AH / 1726 CE

Saud was succeeded briefly by the family elder Zaid bin Markhan bin Watban, who was killed in 1139 AH / 1726 CE, paving the way for the accession of Muhammad bin Saud bin Muhammad bin Muqrin. His leadership would mark the beginning of a transformative era. As both ruler of Diriyah and, eventually, the first imam of the nascent First Saudi State, Muhammad bin Saud set the stage for a new political and religious order in central Arabia

The Diriyah Pact (1744)

A pivotal turning point in Arabian history occurred in 1744, when Imam Muhammad bin Saud concluded a historic agreement with the reformist scholar Shaykh Muhammad bin ʻAbd al-Wahhab. This pact, forged in Diriyah, united political authority with a religious reform movement aimed at purifying Islamic practice from what the two leaders viewed as polytheistic practices, heresies, and superstitions Their agreement rested on two essential pillars A commitment to revive the teachings and creed associated with the early generations of Islam Mutual cooperation in spreading the reformist call, strengthening Diriyah's authorityThe Diriyah Pact became the ideological and institutional foundation of the First Saudi State. From Diriyah, the daʻwah spread rapidly, gaining supporters across Najd, al-Hasa, the Hijaz, parts of Oman, and beyond the peninsula

The conquest of Riyadh

In the decades following the pact, several Najdi settlements including al-ʻUyaynah, Manfuha, and Huraymila voluntarily joined the expanding Saudi-Diriyah state, followed later by Dhurma and Shaqra Relations between Riyadh and Diriyah had long been cordial, and ce Daham bin Dawwas, the ruler of Riyadh, initially maintained loyalty and cooperation with Muhammad bin Saud However, after the arrival of Shaykh Muhammad bin ʻAbd al-Wahhab in Diriyah and the subsequent rise of the reformist movement, Daham's attitude shifted. Seeing the rapid expansion of Diriyah's influence, he adopted a hostile stance, persecuting supporters of the new

call within Riyadh and attacking neighbouring settlements that had allied with Diriyah such as Manfuha

Under Imam Muhammad bin Saud and later his son Imam Abdulaziz, the Saudi state engaged in a prolonged struggle with Daham bin Dawwas. Over twenty-eight years, nearly thirty-five military engagements occurred between the two sides, causing the deaths of around four thousand people The conflict culminated in 1773, after the event known as the Hudaym al-Marqab, when Daham fled Riyadh. Imam Abdulaziz entered the city, placing it under the governance of Prince Abdullah bin Muqrin bin Muhammad bin Muqrin. This victory marked one of the most significant early expansions of the First Saudi State

During this same period, Muhammad bin Saud consolidated power across the wider Diriyah region, defeating rival tribes including the Ajman in engagements such as the Battle of the Ajman, where approximately fifty Ajman tribesmen were killed and the survivors fled south toward Najran, home of the Yami tribesThe period between 1764 and 1774 CE (1178–1188 AH) marked a critical and turbulent phase in the history of the nascent First Saudi State centered in Diriyah. The rising influence of the Saudi–Wahhabi alliance under Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad bin Saud and Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdulwahhab inevitably provoked significant resistance from established regional powers, most notably the Bani Khalid Emirate of Al-Ahsa and the powerful Yam tribes led by the ruler of Najran

The Saudi–Bani Khalid Conflict and the Consolidation of the First Saudi State (1764–1774 CE)

The period between 1764 and 1774 CE (1178–1188 AH) marked a critical and turbulent phase in the history of the nascent First Saudi State centered in Diriyah. The rising influence of the Saudi–Wahhabi alliance under Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad bin Saud and Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdulwahhab inevitably provoked significant resistance from established regional powers, most notably the Bani Khalid Emirate of Al-Ahsa and the powerful Yam tribes led by the ruler of NajranThe conflict escalated from a localized tribal dispute. In 1177 AH (1763 CE), while returning to Diriyah, Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad received news of an assault by the Ajman tribe on a group from the Subaiʿ tribe near Sudair. Abdulaziz pursued the Ajman to Qadhlah. In response, the Ajman sought military assistance from the southern power of Najran and its powerful Yam tribes The call was answered by the formidable Najran leader, Hassan bin Hibatullah Al-Makrami, who began preparations for a military campaign. Simultaneously, Al-Makrami established a crucial alliance with one of Diriyah's most persistent adversaries, Aray'ar bin Dujayn, the paramount leader of the Bani Khalid in Al-Ahsa. The alliance, driven by a shared animosity toward the expansionist and reformist doctrines of the Wahhabi movement, agreed to converge their forces at Al-Ha'ir, south of Riyadh, with the objective of jointly attacking Diriyah The allied forces clashed with Diriyah's troops in 1178 AH (1764 CE) in the Battle of Al-Haʿir. The result was a significant defeat for the forces of Diriyah, a battle considered by historians like Al-Othaimeen to be a pivotal event due to its profound impact on the geopolitical landscape of the Najd region. Following the engagement, a settlement was negotiated to exchange prisoners, and the Najran army subsequently withdrewDespite the withdrawal of the Najran contingent, the leader of the Bani Khalid, Aray'ar bin Dujayn, launched a major offensive in 1178 AH (1765 CE). This large coalition included Al-Makramiʿs Najran forces, the Emir of Riyadh Dahham bin Dawwas, and several other Najdi emirs opposed to the Saudi ascendancy

The combined armies advanced toward the Saudi capital. In a pragmatic move, Imam Muhammad bin Saud and Imam Muhammad bin Abdulwahhab successfully negotiated a temporary peace agreement with a faction of the Bani Khalid leadership, which successfully induced a halt to some of Aray'ar's allied attacks. Nonetheless, Aray'ar's main forces pressed onward, reaching Diriyah and subjecting the city to an intense siege that lasted for an entire month The Saudi state faced a moment of existential crisis, with the emerging entity nearly succumbing to the combined power of its enemies. However, Aray'ar bin Dujayn was ultimately compelled to lift the siege and withdraw, signaling a crucial failure to deliver a decisive blow against the Saudi center The complex network of alliances and resistance continued to shape central Arabia. Zaid bin Zamil, the Emir of the strategically located town of Al-Dilam south of Riyadh, initially attempted to navigate the shifting political currents. Following earlier losses to Diriyah, Zaid ultimately chose to ally with the traditional anti-Saudi force of Najran and the Yam tribes, hoping to curb further Saudi expansion This alliance precipitated the Second Battle of Al-Ha'ir. Saudi forces engaged the coalition of Najran and Al-Dilam, emerging victorious. This victory was instrumental, not only solidifying Saudi military dominance over southern Najd but also neutralizing a critical route for potential southern support against Diriyah Zaid bin Zamil retreated to Al-Dilam and prepared for a final stand, leading to the Siege of Al-Dilam. Despite determined resistance, Zaid was eventually defeated, and the town was fully brought under Saudi control. In a typical move of political consolidation, the Saudi leadership appointed Sulayman ibn Ufaysan as the new emir, ensuring the town's loyalty to Diriyah and eliminating the threat from that quarterMeanwhile, the Bani Khalid leader, Aray'ar bin Dujayn, launched one final significant campaign in 1188 AH (1774 CE), targeting the Qassim region. He succeeded in expelling the Saudi-aligned governor, Abdullah bin Hassan, and installing Rashid Al-Duraibi Al Abu Alyan. He intended to proceed with another attack on Diriyah but passed away just two months after withdrawing

from Buraidah. His death triggered internal power struggles within the Bani Khalid leadership, with power eventually transferring to Sa'dun bin Aray'ar

The determined resistance of figures like Zaid bin Zamil and the formidable campaigns led by Aray'ar bin Dujayn underscore the complex tribal and political dynamics of the era. However, their ultimate defeats and the successful defense of Diriyah demonstrated the growing resilience, military effectiveness, and political-religious legitimacy of the First Saudi State, which continued its inexorable expansion across central Arabia

The Saudi Conquest of Qatif and Tarout

The final subjugation of the Qatif region by the First Saudi State represented the crucial culmination of the long-standing conflict with the Bani Khalid Emirate of Al-Ahsa. This campaign, following the dissolution of the independent Al-Humaid Emirate in Al-Ahsa in 1208 AH / 1794 CE, secured the Saudi control over the entire eastern coast of Arabia The groundwork for the final conquest was laid earlier, in 1206 AH / 1792 CE, when Saud bin Abdulaziz led a significant military expedition toward the Qatif area. This was a strategic move aimed at weakening a region known for its staunch resistance to Saudi authority before the decisive confrontation with the Bani Khalid Saud's forces besieged and captured the town of Saihat, followed by the occupation of the nearby villages of Anak, Qudaih, and Al-Awamiyah. He then laid siege to Qatif's main port. The siege was lifted only after the local population paid a substantial tribute of 3,000 gold coins. At this stage, full annexation was not the goal, but rather establishing Saudi military presence and extracting compliance

After the fall of Al-Ahsa (1794 CE), pockets of Khalidi resistance remained primarily in Qatif. To finally secure the region, Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad dispatched a large expeditionary force of 8,000 fighters led by Ibrahim ibn Ufaysan The leadership in the Qatif region was fragmented: Abdullah bin Sulayman al-Muhayshuri al-Khalidi commanded the Khalidi military forces, while Ahmad bin Ghanim al-Qatifi held authority over the local population within the town

Ibn Ufaysan's forces first descended upon Saihat. Abdullah bin Sulayman sent a contingent led by his son Ali, which engaged the Saudis. The battle resulted in a Saudi defeat, forcing Ibn Ufaysan to retreat temporarily to Dhahran Despite the setback, Ibn Ufaysan launched raids on the outskirts of Qatif. Abdullah bin Sulayman led his main Khalidi force in a counteroffensive, leaving Ahmad bin

Ghanim responsible for defending the town and its fortress. The two armies clashed fiercely near Al-Jarudiyah After twelve days of heavy fighting, Abdullah bin Sulayman was defeated and forced to flee toward Tarout Island, taking refuge in its fortified castle. Upon hearing this, Ahmad bin Ghanim fortified the Qatif citadel. Ibn Ufaysan demanded surrender, which Ahmad initially agreed to, but his fear of Khalidi retribution prevented him from complying. Consequently, Ibn Ufaysan stormed the fortress by force, seized Qatif, and executed many of the inhabitants. Ahmad bin Ghanim and his faction managed to escape Following the capture of Qatif, the focus shifted to the last stronghold of Khalidi resistance on Tarout Island, where Abdullah bin Sulayman had retreated

Ibrahim ibn Ufaysan dispatched his brother, Fahd (or Fahrad), with 2,000 men to confront Abdullah bin Sulayman. Fahd’s initial attempts to breach the fortified castle failed, and he suffered significant losses, leading him to request and receive an additional 1,000 troops. Even with reinforcements, the assault failed, and Fahd was forced to retreat In a decisive move, Abdullah bin Sulayman launched a surprise counterattack against Fahd’s camp, inflicting a major defeat on the Saudi forces,

killing 200 men and capturing their supplies. Ibrahim ibn Ufaysan, entrenched in Qatif, was instructed by Imam Abdulaziz not to be lured into a trap and to maintain his position New reinforcements arrived under the command of Salih bin Rashid Al-Dosari. Ibn Ufaysan was ordered to lead the combined army against Tarout while Al-Dosari secured Qatif. Ibn Ufaysan marched once more on Tarout and initiated a siege. After 21 days, the Saudi forces successfully stormed the island and seized control. Abdullah bin Sulayman fled to Al-Muntafiq, marking the effective end of Khalidi power in the region

While the detailed account of the conquest of Qatif and Tarout is preserved by the anonymous author of "Lama' al-Shihab fi Sirat Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab", exact dates are not provided. However, the source confirms that these decisive events occurred During the reign of Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad

These successful campaigns firmly incorporated the entire Arabian Peninsula's eastern coast into the rapidly expanding First Saudi State

Ibrahim ibn Ufaysan's Expedition (1793 CE)

The year 1793 CE (1207 AH) marked a significant expansion of the military reach of the First Saudi State beyond the Najd heartland, driven by the strategic objective of consolidating dominance over the entire Eastern Arabian coast and neutralizing rival powers. This ambition led to a daring expedition against the nascent maritime emirate of Kuwait, then known locally as al-Qurayn Kuwait, governed by the Al Sabah family, represented a critical strategic challenge to Diriyah. Situated at the head of the Persian Gulf, the port served as a vital node in maritime trade and was increasingly aligning itself with the British East India Company and maintaining nominal allegiance to the Ottoman-backed Banu Khalid leadership. The Saudi campaign, led by the experienced general Ibrahim ibn Ufaysan, was not merely

punitive but was designed to Directly challenge the growing British-Kuwaiti alliance and project Saudi power into the northern Gulf

The Saudi forces, deploying the superior mobility and desert warfare tactics characteristic of their armies, advanced toward Kuwait. The expedition demonstrated the military weight of the Najdi power, forcing the Kuwaiti leadership to confront a threat that had already dismantled the Banu Khalid Emirate in Al-Ahsa Despite the lack of permanent territorial gain, the 1793 invasion was a symbolic watershed for Diriyah. It was an unprecedented projection of power deep into the Gulf region, fundamentally altering the perceived political geography of Arabia The incursion, particularly the penetration of an area considered a British sphere of interest (referred to as Al Qurain), brought the Saudi state to the attention of major European powers The British, astonished by the emergence of this dynamic political-religious movement, initiated closer surveillance. Officials such as William Drury and Thomas Keith were subsequently appointed to monitor Wahhabi movements Even the French, who had interests further south, recognized the growing significance of Diriyah, appointing Commander Vassière to observe affairs from Oman The expedition against Kuwait thus marked the formal transition of the First Saudi State from a landlocked regional power to a major force capable of challenging foreign-backed allies and fundamentally reshaping the political landscape of the Arabian coast

The Campaign Against Tanuma and the Deepening Saudi–Ottoman Iraq (1786 CE)The

The offensive was spearheaded by the Emir of Al-Muntafiq, a powerful tribal confederation in southern Iraq that served as the primary instrument of Ottoman power in the region. The Emir mobilized a massive and diverse coalition drawn from

key Iraqi tribes, including the forces of Al-Muntafiq itself, along with fighters from Al-Majara, Al-Zubayr, and the Bedouin tribes of Shammar, Ghālib, and Tayy This heavily armed force advanced deep into Saudi territory in central Najd. Their campaign reached a brutal climax with the assault on the town of Tanuma. The Iraqi-led coalition captured the town by force, committing a horrifying atrocity that became known as the Massacre of Tanuma. A significant number of the town's inhabitants were slain, sending shockwaves of fear and outrage throughout the central Arabian region

Emboldened by this early, decisive success, the invading forces pressed on to lay siege to Buraidah, a critical Saudi stronghold in the Qassim region. However, just as the siege reached its peak, the Emir of Al-Muntafiq received urgent news of unrest and potential rebellion in his home territories. Fearing a collapse of stability in southern Iraq, he was compelled to immediately lift the siege and withdraw his army, leaving Buraidah battered but unconquered Far from intimidating the First Saudi State, the violence of the Al-Muntafiq campaign and the massacre at Tanuma hardened Saudi resolve. The attack became a direct catalyst for a deeper, ideological conflict between Diriyah and the Emirate of Al-Muntafiq, as well as the Mamluks of Iraq In response, Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad initiated a formal, yet defiant, diplomatic exchange. He dispatched an official letter to Suleiman Pasha the Great, the Ottoman-appointed governor of Baghdad. Crucially, the letter was accompanied by a copy of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's seminal work, The Book of Tawheed (Monotheism), which outlines God's fundamental rights upon His servants. The Imam called upon the governor to assemble the scholars of Baghdad to examine the treatise and embrace its reformist teachings. Suleiman Pasha, representing the established Ottoman religious and political orthodoxy, responded with open mockery and dismissal, rejecting the Wahhabi message and belittling its significance

From the perspective of the First Saudi State, this dismissive rejection served a vital purpose: it solidified their doctrinal view that Iraq had become a "Land of War" (Dār

Ḥarb) a territory in opposition to what they defined as true Islam. The Iraqi campaign and the accompanying massacre thus provided both the political and religious justification for a sustained Saudi policy of armed resistance and expansion into the southern Iraqi frontier

Saudi Incursion into Southern Iraq (1797)

The year 1797 CE (1212 AH) witnessed a significant shift in the military doctrine of the First Saudi State Under the direct command of Imam Saud bin Abdulaziz, Diriyah launched a bold offensive targeting the Al-Dhafeer tribe in the Al-Hujrah region, situated near the southern borders of Ottoman-held Iraq Following the firm consolidation of Saudi rule over Al-Ahsa and the Eastern Arabian coast, the leadership in Diriyah prioritized neutralizing long-standing enemies in the north, specifically The Emirate of Al-Muntafiq The successful raid deep into Al-Hujrah delivered a heavy blow to the Dhafeer, weakening their tribal power and serving as a clear message to all Ottoman-aligned factions that Diriyah was now a power capable of decisive cross-border strikes

The campaign effectively established a forward position from which the Saudis could challenge the Mamluk rulers of Iraq, particularly the semi-autonomous governor of Baghdad, Suleiman Pasha the Great Alarm immediately spread through the Ottoman establishment. Sultan Selim III and Suleiman Pasha exchanged urgent correspondence, pushing for the mobilization of a major Ottoman military campaign to strike at the heart of the First Saudi State, Diriyah itself However, Suleiman Pasha hesitated. He acutely understood the immense difficulty of launching a traditional, large-scale Ottoman campaign into the harsh, arid terrain of Najd a logistical and tactical challenge for an army accustomed to different battlefields Moreover, the Pasha was cautious of triggering unrest among the tribes of southern Basra, who had

already demonstrated signs of discontent and might align themselves with the ascendant Saudi power should a full-scale invasion commence

the fall of Qatar and Al-Zubarah (1793–1799 CE)

Following the decisive conquest and consolidation of the Al-Ahsa region in the early 1790s, the leadership of the First Saudi State in Diriyah shifted its expansionist focus toward the Qatar Peninsula The peninsula, and specifically the affluent town of Al-Zubarah, became a crucial haven for enemies of Diriyah. Al-Zubarah offered protection and refuge to several leaders of the defeated Banu Khalid Emirate, including Zaid bin Arir and Abdulmuhsin, as well as many residents of Al-Ahsa who had fled the advancing Saudi armies. The town's dual role as a center for opposition and an economically prosperous trading port made it an inevitable and vital strategic target for the Saudis Under the pretext of propagating the Wahhabi reformist message, Imam Saud bin Abdulaziz ordered his seasoned general, Ibrahim ibn Ufaysan, to launch a military expedition into the peninsulaThe initial campaign reached Qatar in 1791 (exact month undisclosed), resulting in clashes with local tribes and the loss of approximately fifty Qatari defenders A follow-up invasion in 1793 targeted Al-Huwaylah, the seat of the influential Al-Musallam clan, located south of modern Doha. Al-Huwaylah was swiftly captured, along with surrounding settlements including Fariha, Al-Yusufiyyah, and Al-Ruwaidha. This left Al-Zubarah as the last remaining stronghold on the peninsula With Saudi rule firmly secured in Al-Ahsa by 1794, Ibn Ufaysan sought and received permission from Diriyah to move against Al-Zubarah. Lacking a naval fleet, the Saudi commander implemented a strategy of land-based siege and resource deprivation Ibn Ufaysan's forces methodically disrupted Al-Zubarah's access to essential resources, cutting off the city from Water from wells located approximately seven miles away Firewood from the outskirts By blocking all land access, the Saudi siege effectively isolated Al-Zubarah and severed its vital supply lines. Meanwhile, Saudi raiding parties

continued to secure other settlements in Qatar, further weakening Al-Zubarah's external support network Despite their initial determined resistance, the residents of Al-Zubarah recognized the gravity of the situation. The Saudi siege was not a temporary maneuver; Ibn Ufaysan was resolute in his commitment to victory Facing inevitable defeat by an enemy they could not outmaneuver on land, the townspeople made the collective decision to abandon the city entirely. They evacuated by sea, transporting themselves and their resources to the nearby island of Bahrain. Upon arrival, they settled in the region of Jaw and immediately constructed a fortress for their defense, signaling their intent to continue their resistance from a secure maritime base This strategic evacuation, though preventing a catastrophic Saudi conquest of the city, effectively brought the Qatar Peninsula under the firm military and political control of the First Saudi State, eliminating the last major center of resistance on the mainland Prior to their departure, the residents of Al-Zubarah issued orders for the destruction of their military outposts at Al-Akwat. This was a calculated defensive measure intended to deny the Saudi forces any usable fortifications that could have allowed them to immediately entrench themselves further into the region It is recorded that Ibn Ufaysan felt a profound sense of melancholy upon witnessing the formerly vital town reduced to silence and abandonment With the occupation of the deserted town, Al-Zubarah definitively fell under Saudi control. This event marked the culmination of nearly a decade of sustained military pressure and ideological justification for intervention in Qatar successfully extending the influence of the First Saudi State over the entire peninsula

The Kuwaiti–Saudi Conflict and the Northern Gulf Frontier (1793–1808 CE)

The final decade of the 18th century marked the beginning of direct military tension between the First Saudi State and the maritime emirate of Kuwait (under the Al-Sabah family). The collapse of the Banu Khalid Emirate in Eastern Arabia fundamentally altered the regional power dynamics, bringing the Saudi expansionist frontier directly to Kuwait's borders The primary catalyst for conflict was Kuwait's policy of offering asylum to Saudi adversaries. Key leaders of the defeated Banu Khalid, including Zaid bin Arir (in 1793) and Abdulmuhsin Al-Sardah (in 1795), sought refuge in Kuwait, directly challenging Diriyah's authority. The first Saudi military action against Kuwait occurred in 1208 AH / 1793 CE. Ibrahim ibn Ufaysan, a prominent Saudi commander, led a raid supported by forces from Al-Kharj, Al-ʻĀriḍ, and Sudayr. The incursion, though not resulting in permanent territorial acquisition, led to the death of approximately thirty Kuwaitis and the seizure of livestock and weapons The growing and persistent Saudi threat spurred the Kuwaiti leadership to adopt defensive measures, notably the construction of a defensive wall around Kuwait City in 1212 AH / 1797 CE Despite the fortifications, the Saudis continued intermittent raids along the frontier. A notable attack occurred in 1798, when Manaʼ Abu Rijlain, operating under the orders of Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad, raided the outskirts of Kuwait. Though the Kuwaitis responded with a sizable force, a Saudi ambush in Hafar Al Batin resulted in the death of approximately 20 Kuwaiti fighters and the capture of additional arms and supplies

Kuwait never formally entered an offensive alliance with the Bani Khalid against the Saudis. However, the recurring raids and the continuous harboring of Saudi enemies symbolized a defiance that Diriyah could not tolerate

The final major confrontation of this period occurred in 1808, when Imam Saud bin Abdulaziz himself led an army to lay siege to Kuwait. Despite the Saudi efforts, the siege was ultimately unsuccessful; the fortified city was not breached, nor did the Kuwaiti leadership offer political surrender British records from the era, particularly accounts by Lorimer and Mr. Ryno, provide insight into the international dimensions of the conflict. The British East India Company monitored the Wahhabi campaigns with increasing concern as they approached British maritime interests in the Gulf. Conflicting intelligence estimated the Saudi forces at between 500 and 2,000 fighters, mounted on camels and utilizing muskets and spears in coordinated formations

Crucially, some British reports allege that British officers intervened by deploying naval artillery and sepoys (Indian troops) to aid the city's defense against the Saudi advances, highlighting the geopolitical importance of Kuwait to the British Empire

The sustained period of intermittent military pressure between 1793 and 1808 demonstrated the persistence of Saudi expansionist ambitions. While the First Saudi State never fully occupied Kuwait, the continuous raids and the psychological impact of the Wahhabi expansion kept the emirate on high alert and highlighted its strategic vulnerability.

These campaigns further isolated the remnants of the Banu Khalid, whose political influence was definitively broken after the Battle of Guraymil in 1789. This long-term pressure against Kuwait paved the way for the uncontested Saudi expansion into the other coastal emirates of the Persian Gulf

The Al-Muntafiq Campaigns (1787–1797 CE)

The confrontation began in 1787 CE (1201 AH) when Thuwaini bin Abdullah mobilized a large tribal-Ottoman coalition from Basra, aiming to penetrate the Najdi interior and curb the rising Saudi influence 1787 Campaign Thuwaini's forces advanced southward and succeeded in taking the town of Tanuma by force. However, the expedition ultimately failed to capture the key Saudi strongholds of Buraidah and Unayzah in the Qassim region. Thuwaini was forced to withdraw without achieving his primary strategic objectives Two years later, in 1789 CE (1203 AH), Thuwaini renewed his offensive with a more direct and ambitious strike aimed at the northern approaches of Al-Ahsa. This culminated in the major Battle of As-Saman. Saudi forces successfully confronted and decisively defeated the invading army. The casualties for the Iraqi side were assessed as extraordinarily high, reportedly reaching over 13,000 dead. The devastating failure at As-Saman compelled the Iraqis and their tribal allies to retreat once again, significantly strengthening the Saudi position in the Gulf region

The confrontation reached its peak between 1796 and 1797 CE. Thuwaini launched his most aggressive campaign, coordinating both land and maritime movements along the Kuwaiti coast in a determined bid to break Saudi control over Al-Ahsa permanentlyThe combined forces marched toward Al-Ahsa, engaging in a few skirmishes with a Wahhabi contingent under Mohammed bin Muaqil, resulting in a brief Wahhabi defeat. However, a sudden and pivotal event averted a major battle

While the army was preoccupied setting up camp at Al-Shabak, a Bani Khalid watershed near the sea, Sheikh Thuwaini separated from his entourage and was assassinated by a Mamluk slave of Bani Khalid named Tais The impact of Sheikh Thuwaini Al-Saadoun's assassination was immense, causing panic and anxiety in Baghdad and at the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman capital), as the Ottoman-Mamluk

administration heavily relied on his military capabilities to repel the relentless Wahhabi advance toward IraqThuwaini's sudden death threw the invading army into disarray. His brother attempted to rally the defeated forces and reorganize an attack on the Wahhabis but was ultimately defeated in the Battle of Sabhab The Saudi forces seized the opportunity to retaliate for years of invasion. They launched counter-raids on the outskirts of Al-Muntafiq during Ramadan, culminating in the successful sacking of Suq al-Shuyukh in 1798

The death of Thuwaini bin Abdullah Al-Muntafiqi and the failure of his final, massive campaign effectively removed the primary military threat to the Saudi control of Eastern Arabia, allowing the First Saudi State to fully consolidate its gains and focus on expansion into the Hejaz and further into Iraq

The Campaign of Ali Al-Kahiya and the Six-Year Truce (1798 CE)

The year 1798 CE (1213 AH) saw the Ottoman Sultanate, through the Sublime Porte, initiate a determined and large-scale military response to the escalating power of the First Saudi State. The Sublime Porte ordered the Mamluk governor of Baghdad, Minister Suleyman Pasha the Great, to eliminate the perceived Wahhabi threat that was menacing Ottoman frontiers and commerce The primary objective of the campaign, led by Ali Pasha Al-Kahiya (or Al-Kakhia), was the Saudi capital, Diriyah. However, given the immense distance and logistical difficulties, the Pasha chose the longer, but theoretically safer, route to Al-Ahsa from Basra, intending to use the eastern province as a staging ground

The campaign was viewed with skepticism even before its launch. Ali Pasha’s ignorance of military affairs and, critically, his poor treatment of the key tribal leaders (upon whom he was dependent for desert logistics and knowledge) led many

to predict the campaign's collapse Ali Pasha’s forces were initially successful in occupying most of the Wahhabi positions in Al-Ahsa. However, they were unable to capture the two crucial Saudi garrisons: the Qasr Sahoud fort in Mubarraz and the fort in Al-Hofuf. The Qatif Castle was also reported to have held out for two months The commander of the fort of Mubarraz was Suleiman bin Muhammad bin Majid, while Ibrahim bin Ufaysan commanded the Qatif Castle. Ali Pasha was ordered to focus his efforts on besieging the Mubarraz Fort Ali Pasha failed to seize the fort despite his artillery causing cracks in the walls. The artillery that the Pasha had brought was reportedly suitable for striking defensive centers built of stone, but was ill-suited for the local fortifications constructed primarily of al-rahas (clay and mud brick) With every day spent on the protracted siege, the army faced double the hardship and difficulty. Supplies and strength began to run out before the main goal was achieved. The loss of camels, crucial for desert transport, served as a stark warning of total logistical collapse

Plagued by boredom and thirst, the Ottoman army weakened significantly. Having failed even in the basic mission of preventing Al Saud's attacks on southern Iraq, Ali Pasha was forced to contemplate retreat. Unable to transport his heavy equipment, he was compelled to destroy or bury much of his weapons in the dirt. As ammunition and supplies dwindled, the soldiers demanded to return Recognizing the tactical collapse of the Ottoman invasion, Prince Saud bin Abdulaziz moved to consolidate the strategic victory. Messengers were exchanged to negotiate peace with Ali Pasha.

Ultimately, Ali Pasha, recognizing the failure of the costly expedition and through the intervention of several high-ranking tribal leaders, agreed to conclude a six-year non-aggression pact with the Wahhabis. This pact, necessitated by the military and logistical defeat of the Ottoman-Mamluk force, served as a temporary but significant diplomatic recognition of the Saudi state's power in Eastern Arabia

raids on Iraq (1799-1811)

Tensions, already high following the previous campaigns, flared drastically in 1799. The Khaza'il tribe, a powerful Shiite tribal faction near Najaf, ambushed a group of Saudis, slaughtering nearly 300 of them in cold blood. This massacre sent shockwaves through Diriyah, igniting intense calls for retaliation across Najd Diplomatic channels were briefly pursued. The Saudis formally protested the killings and demanded blood money from the Ottoman wali of Baghdad, Suleyman Pasha. The Pasha dispatched a delegate, Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Shawi, to Diriyah during his return from pilgrimage to mediate with Imam Abdul Aziz bin Muhammad. However, the negotiations ultimately failed, leaving war as the only recourse By 1802, the time for negotiation had passed. Imam Saud Al-Kabir, son of Abdul Aziz, led a formidable Saudi force northward into Ottoman Iraq. The primary target was Karbala, one of the most sacred cities in Shiite Islam. The campaign was fueled by a mix of vengeance for the 1799 massacre, religious zeal against perceived Shiite heresies, and the strategic goal of asserting Wahhabi authority over the Shiite regions bordering Najd The Saudi army executed a swift and devastating assault, overwhelming the defenders. The forces proceeded to demolish shrines, including the gilded dome of the tomb of Imam Hussein a deeply provocative act that sent shockwaves throughout the Shiite world. The city's treasury and religious endowments were heavily looted before the Saudis rapidly withdrew southward.This attack deeply humiliated the Ottoman Empire and enraged Fath-Ali Shah, the Qajar Shah of Iran, who pressured the Ottoman governor to act, threatening the Iraqi government with invasion The conflict intensified in 1803 when Imam Abdul Aziz bin Muhammad was assassinated in Diriyah by Mulla Uthman, an Afghan from Baghdad who had witnessed the horrors of the Karbala sack. His son, abdallah swiftly retaliated by executing the assassin and ascended to leadership with a renewed commitment to punitive action

In response to his father's assassination and continued Iraqi resistance, Saud Al-Kabir launched a brutal series of campaigns Saudi forces raided the Dhafir tribe in the desert pastures, resulting in mass pillaging. Saud then marched on Basra, entering the city by force and killing many inhabitants. They subsequently struck a contingent of Al-Muntafiq tribesmen near Basra, capturing their leader, Mansur bin Thamir Al-Saadoun, and slaying or driving off the remaining fighters. Saudi forces also stormed Zubayr, killing many and razing structures and looting farmlands 1804–1805: Wahhabi troops continued their pressure, overrunning neighborhoods of Zubayr and Basra. Saud defeated the powerful Zafir tribe, which had attempted to resist his authority, and later besieged and pillaged Nasiriyah The Wahhabis besieged and sacked Al-Najaf in 1806, and successfully raided Samawa and Zubayr. In 1808, Saud appeared in the environs of Karbala once more, but the town was well-defended. Later that year, Saud mustered an immense force of 45,000 troops and marched toward Baghdad, managing to storm the city's southern side and defeat the enemy before withdrawing back to Najd in 1809 In late 1809, capitalizing on the death of Sharif Surur, Saud mustered 15,000 Wahhabis. They seized the fortress of Al-Jufair, which overlooks the Euphrates River, and decisively annihilated an army of Suleyman Pasha Saud then attacked the fortress of Al-Siraj

The new Pasha of Baghdad attempted to counter the Saudi expansion in late 1809 by sending a regular army and Iraqi Bedouins. Though they penetrated a short distance, they were defeated in the Battle of Tufair by the Saudi-loyal Anaza and Zafir tribes The campaigns concluded with a major offensive in 1810 led by Abdallah bin Saud Abdallah's forces pushed north, attacking Al Diwaniyah, breaking through its defenses, and plundering a sector of the city. A small Iraqi field force led by Hasan Al-Karimi was attacked and Al-Karimi was killed. Abdallah continued the campaign Battle of Al Azizyah A large force from Baghdad was dispatched to halt the Wahhabi campaign, meeting Abdallah's army at Al Aziziyah. Abdallah's forces emerged victorious, reaching the vicinity of Baghdad and attacking Hillah where they

achieved successful victory The year 1811 marked a high point in Wahhābī expansion, as their de facto control encompassed a vast sweep of territory in southern Iraq. Their sphere of influence was such that it effectively reached the Ottoman administrative center of Baghdad The Saudi State successfully expanded its circle of influence annexing the lands west of the Euphrates River from Ana to Basra to its territory, and intermittently collected zakat (Islamic tax) from the southern Iraqi tribes The ultimate failure of the Iraqi governors to defeat the First Saudi State in this prolonged war prompted the Ottoman state to shift strategy, eventually requesting the powerful governor of Egypt to intervene militarily against the Wahhabis

Invasion Of Oman (1800-1813)

In 1800, the Wahhabis marched into Buraimi defeating the Omani garrison and planted their governor there and began to dominate the surrounding territory. From its original back-to-basics beginnings In 1801 the Wahhabi army, led by Salim al-Kharq, one of Imam Abd al-Aziz's Mamelukes, successfully attacked Oman. Saqr, capturing the city the ruler of the strategically important port and town of Ras al-Khaima, the centre of the Qawasim tribe, swore allegiance to the Wahhabis Other small shaikhdoms and emirates along the Gulf coast were also subdued The ruler of Muscat, Sultan in Ahmad, found himself dependent on al-Diriya. When he went to Mecca for the hajj in 1803, his relative Badr tried to seize power in his absence but failed and fled to the Saudi capital. Trying to organize resistance to the Wahhabis, Sultan decided to strengthen his ties with the pasha of Baghdad whose emissaries had long been encouraging him to attack their common enemy in 1804 thr Renewal of Wahhābī Activity in Oman they raided Rustaq capturing their Garrison Zahir bin Malik Sultan Saʿīd undertook a naval campaign in the Gulf, having been forced to rely on his own strength after only receiving promises of aid from the English and

the Turks The campaign ended in a indecisive result Upon his return to Muscat, Sultan Saʿīd was attacked by three Qawāsim ships. He was hit by a bullet in the head and was killed Sultan's relative Badr, who had been living in exile in al-Diriyah, now returned to Muscat, hoping to establish himself with the help of his Saudi protectors. He retained power for some years and tried to inculcate the Wahhabi doctrine, but without any notable success. Sultan ibn Ahmad's sons rebelled against him 1807 and dethroned Badr. The new rulers of Muscat Salim and then his brother Said first observed obedience to the Saudis, but then refused to pay the tribute and began preparations for hostilities. and the interior of Oman lay vulnerable to Wahhabi incursions In 1806, the Wahhabis, under the command of Mutlaq bin Muhammad Al-Mutairi, launched a full-scale invasion of northern Oman. Their first significant victory came in As Suwayq Saudi forces swept through Suhar, one of the Gulf's most important ports. They captured the coastal city and removed local resistance, consolidating control over Oman's maritime links. From there, they besieged the formidable Nakhal Fort, a mountain bastion long considered impregnable. Despite the strong walls and determined defenders, the Wahhabi assault prevailed, further cementing their power At Ibri, another battle broke out, where Mutlaq's forces overwhelmed tribal defenders and extended Saudi control deeper into the Jabal Akhdar region By 1808 A physician advised the Sultan of Oman to seek aid from the Shah of Iran (Qājār Shah) for military assistance, taking advantage of Iran's hostile stance after the massacre of Karbalāʾ in Iraq The Omani delegation, led by Sālim ibn Sulṭān (Sultan Saʿīd's brother), secured the Shah's agreement. The Shah ordered the preparation of a cavalry army numbering 2,500 men led by Sadiq Khan This force arrived in Barka and Said bin Sultan was able to reclaim the Nakhal forts from the Wahhabis Mutlaq Al -Mutairi left Al-Buraimi at that time, returning to Najd. Sheikh Mohammed bin Nasser Al-Jabri hurried to Al-Buraimi to seek his help, but found that he had left. He went after him and kept urging him to confront the joint Iranian-Omani force. He returned after Sheikh Mohammed bin Nasser Al-Jabri promised to supply the army and provide it with the necessary money.Mutlaq

Al-Mutairi mobilized the tribes of Naim, Bani Qitab, Al-Dhawahir and Al-Duruʼ, and for the first time the Omani tribes of Bani Bu Ali joined him against the Iranian campaign. At the same time, the forces of Salem bin Sultan and the Persians, led by Saadi Khan, gathered in Izki. Sheikh Issa bin Saleh Al-Harthi came to them at the head of his tribe. The battle took place near Izki, and the joint Iranian-Omani forces were defeated. Sadiq Khan was wounded and fled and returned to Barka abandoning his man that was stranded in Oman All that remained of the Omani and Iranian forces camped in samail Mutlaq's forces continued their campaign, seizing Samail and laying siege to its fort from the Persians which eventually fell Upon hearing of two Persian ships stationed in Muttrah, Mutlaq launched a successful assault, destroying the the Persian ships in 1809 The Imām Saʿūd ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz sent a small expedition (sarīyah) to Oman to teach the fundamentals of the faith and to check on the situation of his followers in Oman The expedition encountered forces led by Qays ibn Aḥmad and Sultān ibn Saʿīd's brother. These local forces amounted to about 10,000 men Sultān ibn Ṣaqar ibn Rāshid (Ruler of Ras al-Khaymah) sent word to the people of Oman, gathering approximately 3,000 men. They met the forces of Qays and Sulṭān at the location known as Khawr Fakkān in Oman's Al-Bāṭinah region and Ras al-Khaymah The battle was fierce. Qays's forces suffered a massive defeat. Qays ibn Aḥmad was killed, and many of his people perished by slaughter or by drowning in the sea. It is said that approximately 4,000 men died a Huge blow to the Omani empire Later that year On December 31, 1809, the combined forces both by sea and land besieged Shināṣ When the Wahhābīs refused to surrender the fortress the attacking forces opened fire with cannons upon them However, the initial shelling did not achieve its objective The battle was fierce, and a great massacre occurred on the Omani forces Despite the heavy losses Sayyid Saʿīd ibn Sulṭān was forced to withdraw from the area Another major defeat for the Omani empire

in April 1809 a fleet sailed from Bushire carrying 4,000 men with the purpose of joining up with a second force from Muscat for a joint attack upon the Jalahima at Khaur Hassan, to be followed, perhaps, if successful, by another upon the Qawasim of Ras al-Khaima. But the project lacked sufficient ships and planning; the Persian fleet soon fell in with a superior force of 22 Qasimi dows, lost six large vessels and returned defeated to Bushire in 1810 the Wahhabis besieged Muscat but the they were repulsed by a Persian commander Sadiq Khan an Omani-Persian attacked a Wahhabi outpost near Muscat to try to break the blockade but failed the attempt triggered the Wahhabis to re-besieged the city of Muscat in 1811 months after the fell to the Wahhabis Ravaged the pillaged the town and then swept through Eastern Hajar in a tornado of bloodshed and destruction Mutlaq quickly reinforced Omani fortresses around Muscat Barka Sur because he received the report that the British Navy had landed near Suhar Mutlaq led his forces to Suhar were he met the British forces led by Captain Charles Fenton they met at ibri both clashed with full force Captain Charles Fenton was killed in the action and the British were defeated by the Wahhabi

By 1812, the highlands of Jabal Shams and the rugged interior of Oman had become a theater of irregular war. Unlike the open-field battles that characterized earlier Saudi Omani clashes Small, mobile Omani war bands often no more than twenty to forty men operated independently or in loose coordination. Armed with muskets, daggers, and light cavalry, they practiced hit-and-run warfare Ambushing Wahhabi patrols in narrow passes at dawn or dusk Raiding supply caravans, killing guards and dispersing camels Although the fighting appeared tribal in form, it was not purely spontaneous. The Omani imperial government, under the Al Bu Sa‘id authority, quietly supported the insurgency Despite months of successful harassment, the Omani tribal forces eventually overreached. In the final months of 1812, emboldened by earlier successes and encouraged by Muscat’s quiet support, several tribal bands attempted a large-scale coordinated raid against a major Wahhabi supply column

moving through the interior The objective was ambitious: to cut a principal route linking Wahhabi garrisons near the interior of Oman with their Najdi bases, deliver a symbolic blow, and reignite wider resistance in the highlands of Jabal ShamsUnlike earlier attacks, this raid required prolonged engagement. The Omani fighters gathered in greater numbers than usual and chose to strike in more open terrain near a known caravan crossing. Unknown to them, Wahhabi commanders had anticipated such a move. Months of losses had forced them to adapt: patrols were now heavier, routes varied, and tribal intelligence networks had been penetrated.

When the Omani forces launched their attack, they found the caravan well-defended and prepared. Wahhabi troops formed disciplined firing lines, anchoring themselves on higher ground and protecting the camels at the center. Reinforcements from a nearby detachment arrived swiftly, turning what was meant to be an ambush into a pitched fight precisely the kind of engagement the tribes sought to avoid The narrow routes that once favored the guerrillas now worked against them. Withdrawal paths became congested, and Wahhabi cavalry pursued relentlessly. Several tribal leaders were killed or captured, and losses were heavy by the standards of irregular warfare

By the opening of 1813, the political and military situation in Oman had deteriorated sharply. The defeat of the Omani tribal forces in late 1812 had weakened resistance in the interior Responding to appeals from factions within Oman and motivated by broader Persian Gulf interests the Qajar court authorized a new expedition. Command of the campaign was entrusted to Mirza Rostam Khan Qajari, a seasoned officer with experience in Gulf and coastal operations Mirza Rostam Khan's force moved by sea, supported by Persian Gulf shipping, and established a foothold along the Omani coast in early 1813. Despite initial progress, the expedition faced serious obstacles. The interior remained difficult terrain for conventional forces while Mutlaq al-Mutairi was stationed with his army near the town of al-Musannah where he met the Iranian army a battle had taken place as Mutlaq had managed to defeat the Iranian

army and Mirza Rostam Khan was killed and some members of the ruling family had made peace with Mutlaq, so the ruler had no choice but to pay tribute to Diriyah but was soon Faded away when The Wahhabis were still menacing and once they even reached Birkah, a mere eighty miles from Muscat. Their pressure was however relieved after 1813 when their formidable commander, Mutlaq bin Muhammad al-Mutairi was killed in a skirmish Said bin Sultan quickly took over Khor Fakkan and Diba, and in the three years that followed he was somehow strong enough to launch blockades of Ras al-Khaimah Perhaps some of Sayyid Said's success arose from a series of events in Oman and beyond marking a decline in Wahhabi power.

the decline of the wahhabis

armies of Egyptians launched anti-Wahhabi campaigns, invading the peninsula from the east from 1811. Under the leadership of Ibrahim Pasha, the Egyptians would defeat the Wahhabis and sack their capital at Diriya in 1818.* Wahhabi fighters who managed to escape the Egyptian assault found their way to Ras al-Khaimah, leading Sayyid Said to propose a joint expedition with Ibrahim Pasha to attack Ras al-Khaimah, an idea that by 1819 had also struck the British. But, by the time a British envoy to Ibrahim Pasha passed through Muscat, Sayyid Said thought better of it and he reportedly advised the British to abandon the ideaDespite repeated efforts, it became increasingly clear that no single regional power was able to defeat the Wahhabis on its own. The Qajar campaigns, intermittent and logistically strained, failed to secure lasting control in Arabia; the Ottoman authorities in Iraq proved unable to suppress Wahhabi pressure along their southern frontiers; and the British and French, though influential at sea and diplomatically active, avoided deep inland commitments. Likewise, Omani resistance, whether tribal or state-backed, succeeded only in delaying and harassing Wahhabi forces rather than destroying their political and military core. In the end, it required the deployment of a vast

Egyptian expeditionary army, equipped with European weapons, artillery, and modern organization, to achieve what others could not. Under Egyptian command and operating systematically across Najd, the campaign unfolded over nearly eight years, combining sieges, scorched-earth tactics, and sustained occupation, until the Saudi state was finally dismantled by force, demonstrating that only overwhelming manpower, modern arms, and prolonged warfare could bring an end to Wahhabi rule

The Establishment of the Emirate of Najd and the Ottoman Najdi Struggle (1819–1824)

The collapse of the First Saudi State in 1818 did not bring lasting stability to central Arabia. Although the destruction of Diriyah by Ibrahim Pasha appeared decisive, the political vacuum left behind in Najd ensured that Saudi authority, though shattered, was not extinguished. In the years that followed, Najd became a landscape of competing claims, shifting loyalties, and persistent resistance to Ottoman–Egyptian domination.

The first member of the House of Saud to attempt the restoration of authority after the fall of Diriyah was Mishari bin Saud, brother of the last Saudi ruler, Abdullah bin Saud. His efforts, however, were short-lived. Ottoman–Egyptian forces captured Mishari soon after his emergence, and he was executed, marking a temporary setback for Saudi ambitions.

More consequential was the survival of Turki bin Abdullah, a grandson of the founding imam Muhammad bin Saud. Unlike many of his relatives, Turki managed to evade capture during the Egyptian campaign by retreating into the deserts and hinterlands of Najd. Patient and methodical, he waited for the moment when Ottoman control weakened and local opposition resurfaced. In 1824, Turki successfully expelled Ottoman–Egyptian troops and their local allies from Riyadh

and its surrounding districts, an achievement that earned him recognition as the founder of the Second Saudi State and the direct ancestor of modern Saudi rulers.

Turki established Riyadh as his capital, signaling a shift in Saudi political geography away from ruined Diriyah. He also drew upon the services of surviving members of the Al Saud family who had escaped captivity in Egypt, among them his son Faisal bin Turki, who would later play a decisive role in Saudi resurgence.

The wider conflict between the Ottomans and the Wahhabis had its roots in the earlier Saudi expansion into the Hijaz, which provoked a full-scale Ottoman response. This culminated in the defeat of Saudi forces and the capture of Diriyah by Ibrahim Pasha, son of Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt. Following this victory, members of the Al Saud dynasty were forced into exile or concealment, pursued relentlessly by Egyptian troops.

In the aftermath, Ibrahim Pasha attempted to impose Ottoman authority over Najd by appointing local rulers to administer the region. These arrangements proved unstable. Rival factions competed for power, while famine and devastation direct consequences of Ibrahim's campaign left much of Najd impoverished and depopulated. Eventually, Ibrahim Pasha withdrew to Egypt, leaving behind a fractured and volatile political environment.

Into this vacuum stepped Muhammad bin Mishari bin Muammar, who traveled from Uyayna to the ruins of Diriyah and began rebuilding the town. Former inhabitants gradually returned, and Diriyah was restored as the capital of Ibn Muammar's emirate. His authority expanded across Al-Kharj, Riyadh, Huraymila, and Al-Washm, and he ruled much of Najd under formal Ottoman suzerainty.

Ottoman-backed rule faced its greatest challenge with the reappearance of Mishari bin Saud Al Saud, brother of Abdullah bin Saud, who had escaped captivity near Yanbu. Taking refuge in Al-Washm, Mishari rallied Al Saud loyalists from Al-Qassim

and Az Zulfi before advancing on Diriyah. Initially, Ibn Muammar pledged allegiance to Mishari, but he soon reconsidered, fearing the loss of his own authority.

With support from the leaders of Huraymila and the powerful Mutayr tribal chief Faisal bin Watban Al-Duwaish, Ibn Muammar mobilized against Mishari. The campaign culminated in the capture of Diriyah, the imprisonment of Mishari in Sadus, and the consolidation of Ibn Muammar's rule.

Having neutralized Mishari, Ibn Muammar turned his attention to Turki bin Abdullah, who had taken refuge in Riyadh. Turki escaped southward to Al-Ha'ir, prompting Ibn Muammar to appoint his son Mishari as governor of Riyadh. At the same time, Muhammad Ali Pasha dispatched a force of 400 Ottoman soldiers under Ghuboush Agha to capture Mishari bin Saud. The balance of power shifted rapidly. Learning of Turki's presence in Dhruma, Ibn Muammar sent his son with a detachment of 100 men. Turki decisively defeated and captured them. He then moved swiftly to seize both Diriyah and Riyadh, capturing Ibn Muammar. Upon confirming that Mishari bin Saud had died in captivity, Turki ordered the execution of Ibn Muammar, his son, Faisal bin Watban Al-Duwaish, and Ghuboush Agha.

Ottoman resistance did not end there. Ghuboush Agha's successor attempted to besiege Imam Turki bin Abdullah in Riyadh, but Turki's forces held firm, forcing the Ottomans to abandon the siege. In response, Muhammad Ali Pasha ordered all available Ottoman troops in Medina to march on Najd under Hussein Bey.

Hussein Bey's column reached Riyadh without opposition and laid siege to the royal palace. Under cover of darkness, Turki and his supporters escaped to Al-Halwa in southern Najd. The remaining defenders surrendered. Hussein Bey executed seventy of Turki's supporters and captured Omar bin Abdulaziz and his son Abdul Malik before withdrawing. Following Hussein Bey's withdrawal, Hassan Pasha, governor of Medina, sent an 800-strong cavalry force under Hassan Bey (Abu Zahir) to reassert

Ottoman authority. The force ravaged Unaizah, Jabal Shammar, Al-Majmaʻah, and Sudair, while aggressive attempts to collect zakat provoked widespread Bedouin resistance across Najd.

Subsequent Ottoman operations met with disaster. Forces from Riyadh and Manfuha under Ibrahim Kashif, accompanied by local allies Nasser bin Nasser Al-Aydhi and Musa bin Mazrou, attacked the Subaie tribe at Al-Badaʻ, south of Riyadh. Led by Sheikh Muhammad bin Daghim Al-Omani, the Subaie inflicted a crushing defeat, killing over 300 Ottoman soldiers, including Ibrahim Kashif and Nasser Al-Aydhi.

Similarly, an Ottoman garrison from Al-Majmaʻah, commanded by Musa Kashif, attacked the Sahul tribe but suffered defeat, losing more than thirty soldiers, including Kashif himself. Survivors fled back to Al-Majmaʻah alongside the emir of Unaizah, Abdullah Al-Jamiʻi.

In Unaizah, resentment against Ottoman rule erupted into open revolt. The population besieged the 600-strong Ottoman garrison under Muhammad Agha, protesting excessive taxation and abuses. After killing approximately seventy soldiers, the townspeople negotiated an agreement allowing Ottoman withdrawal, leaving Riyadh as the last Ottoman stronghold in Najd.During Ramadan 1823, Turki bin Abdullah returned to Najd with just thirty men. He secured the support of leaders from Al-Mahmal, Jaljal, and Sudair, establishing Arqa as his base. Initial attacks on the Ottoman garrisons in Riyadh and Manfuha failed, but Turki successfully repelled a counterattack on Arqa.

By late 1823, Turki captured Dhurma, executing its emir, and steadily eliminated rival leaders, including Mazid bin Ahmed of Al-Majmaʻah and Hamad bin Mubarak of Huraymila. Other towns Zulfi, Al-Ghat, Manikh, Sudair, and Shaqra—submitted without resistance. Manfuha surrendered after negotiations led by Ibrahim bin Salamah, who expelled the Ottoman garrison.

In August 1824, Turki launched a full-scale siege of Riyadh. After a month of fighting, the garrison commander Abu Ali Al-Maghribi negotiated safe passage and surrendered, marking the complete Ottoman withdrawal from Najd.

With the Ottoman Empire distracted by the Greek War of Independence, Turki expanded his authority into Al-Kharj, Al-Qassim, and Jabal Shammar. By 1828, Najd universally recognized his rule. After Faisal bin Turki escaped Egyptian captivity, Turki dispatched him against the Bani Khalid Emirate. At the Battle of Al-Subia, Faisal's forces drawn from Qahtan, Ajman, and Subayʿ tribes—defeated Majid bin Ariar, whose death paved the way for the Saudi conquest of Al-Ahsa and Qatif, completing the restoration of Saudi power.

Reconquest of Al Ahsa (1830)

the campaign to reconquer Al-Hasa in 1830 began with a localized skirmish between Majid bin Arʿir of the Banu Khalid confederation and warriors of the Sibaʿi tribe. What initially appeared as a tribal clash soon escalated into a wider conflict that drew the attention of Imam Turki bin Abdullah, founder of the Second Saudi State. At the time, Imam Turki was engaged in consolidating Saudi authority across Najd and therefore dispatched his son, Faisal bin Turki, to take command of the expedition Faisal bin Turki advanced with his forces into the region and executed a decisive strategic maneuver by encamping between the army of Majid bin Arʿir and the spring of Fiḍat Maʿqila, a vital water source near Hazwa. This move effectively severed the Banu Khalid forces from their access to water, placing them under severe logistical strain. What followed were several days of intense fighting marked by cavalry engagements, rapid charges, and tactical withdrawals on both sides During the first days of Ramadan, Majid bin Arʿir was killed in battle, a development that quickly spread through the ranks and significantly undermined the morale of Banu Khalid. Upon receiving news of the escalating conflict, Imam Turki bin Abdullah personally rode out during the final ten days of Ramadan to join his son and oversee

the concluding phase of the campaign The struggle intensified as individual champions and tribal warriors clashed across the battlefield. Among the notable casualties was Mutlaq al-Musahkh of the Siba'i tribe. Faghran bin Ar'ir, commander of the Banu Khalid forces, was also killed after being struck down by Tahus al-'Udhaybi of the Siba'i. These losses proved decisive. On the morning of the 27th of Ramadan, 1245 AH (March 1830 CE), the Banu Khalid army collapsed and fled the field in full defeat.

Muhammad bin Ar'ir, the remaining leader of the confederation, retreated with the remnants of his forces and sought refuge in Al-Hasa. Imam Turki advanced shortly thereafter and granted him safe conduct in exchange for his surrender, thereby bringing Al-Hasa formally under the authority of the Second Saudi State

This victory not only secured Najd and Al-Hasa but also extended Saudi authority over parts of the Arabian Gulf coast

In 1831 Two Al-Muntafiq armies was marching towards Al Ahsa to reclaim Banu Khalid confederation Territory and kick out the Wahhabi but they were defeated by Faisal bin Turki and the death of Salih Pasha al-Muntafiqi who commended One of the armies near al Ahmadi Along the northern approaches, Saudi forces repeatedly clashed with detachments of the Al-Muntafiq confederation. These encounters were limited in scale, consisting primarily of raids, counter-raids, and brief engagements along desert routes linking southern Iraq with Al-Hasa. Despite occasional losses on both sides, none of these skirmishes resulted in a decisive breakthrough, and Saudi control over the interior trade corridors remained largely intact.British involvement escalated in the Persian Gulf during this period, driven by concerns over Wahhabi influence on maritime commerce and regional alliances. In one notable incident, British naval forces carried out a bombardment of Al-Jubail, targeting coastal installations associated with Saudi authority. While the attack caused material damage and demonstrated British naval superiority at sea, it failed to produce any

lasting strategic effect inland Meanwhile, Egyptian-Ottoman forces attempted to reassert pressure through a renewed inland expedition. This effort culminated in a significant confrontation at Al-Hawiyah, where Wahhabi forces inflicted a clear defeat on the advancing army the Saudis disrupted Egyptian-Ottoman formations and forced their withdrawal. The engagement reinforced the pattern seen throughout the conflict: conventional armies struggled to sustain operations deep within Arabia against a highly adaptive opponent

Wahhabi trade networks continued to operate across the Persian Gulf and into the Indian Ocean. These routes, supported by tribal alliances and inland security, allowed the Saudi state to maintain economic resilience and strategic depth

Egyptian Expedition to Najd (1836)

By 1830, Turki had succeeded in reasserting Saudi authority over al-Hasa, securing the eastern flank of Najd and restoring access to vital trade routes. His influence, however, remained limited in al-Qasim and Ha'il, where local power structures and tribal coalitions resisted full incorporation. Conscious of Ottoman strength in the Hijaz, Turki deliberately restricted the scope of his military operations, avoiding any advance that might provoke a renewed imperial intervention Despite his external caution, internal instability proved far more dangerous. By the early 1830s, divisions within the House of Saud resurfaced, undermining the fragile unity of the restored state. These tensions culminated in 1834, when Turki was assassinated by his cousin Mishari ibn Abdulrahman. Mishari's seizure of power was brief; he was soon killed by Turki's son, Faisal ibn Turki, who emerged as the new imam and ruler of Najd

Faisal inherited a state that was territorially restored but politically vulnerable. His decision in 1836 to refuse the payment of tribute to Ottoman authorities in the Hijaz marked a decisive break with the policy of cautious accommodation pursued by his father. This act of defiance directly triggered an Ottoman–Egyptian response and set

the stage for a renewed invasion of Najd Anticipating confrontation, Faisal attempted to delay Ottoman action through diplomacy and deception. He dispatched his brother to Mecca bearing gifts, expressions of submission, and offers of camels for transport, while simultaneously providing covert assistance to his allies in ‘Asir. These measures failed to prevent escalation. In 1836, Muhammad Ali Pasha ordered a new expedition against Najd, determined to crush Saudi autonomy

Egyptian forces landed at Yanbu in the same year and advanced inland, accompanied by Khalid ibn Saud, a rival Saudi claimant who was intended to replace Faisal. Upon learning of the size and strength of the invading army, Faisal assembled his forces to meet them. However, as news spread of the approaching Egyptian columns, his tribal levies began to desert. Fear of the experienced Ottoman-Egyptian troops weakened morale, and even the inhabitants of Riyadh refused to resist

Faced with collapse, Faisal withdrew from the city with a small group of loyal followers. In 1837, Khalid entered Riyadh and assumed control under Egyptian protection. For a brief period, Muhammad Ali accepted a compromise arrangement, allowing both Faisal and Khalid to rule over separate portions of Najd. This arrangement proved temporary. In 1838, Egyptian forces under the command of Khurshid Pasha launched a decisive campaign against Faisal, defeating him and ending his resistance Faisal was captured and sent as a prisoner to Cairo. With his removal, Muhammad Ali achieved what earlier expeditions had failed to secure: direct occupation of Najd, al-Hasa, and Qatif. Egyptian authority was further extended through the submission of Bahrain, Qatar, Trucial Oman, and the cooperation of Kuwait The Egyptian hold over Arabia proved unsustainable. European pressure particularly British diplomatic intervention forced Muhammad Ali to withdraw most of his forces from Najd and eastern Arabia by April 1840 and two Major defeat for the Egyptian expeditionary forces that suffered in al-Halwa and Dilam and the death of an Egyptian commander Ismail Bey al-Masri

by Wahhabi loyal tribes By the end of 1841, Egyptian rule in central Arabia had effectively collapsed, leaving behind political fragmentation and weakened local administrations

In 1843, Faisal ibn Turki escaped captivity in Cairo and returned to Arabia. Moving swiftly, he eliminated his rival Ibn Thunayan and reestablished himself as ruler, inaugurating his second reign over the Saudi state. This time, Faisal adopted a more pragmatic approach toward imperial power. He formally acknowledged the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan and agreed to pay an annual tribute in exchange for official recognition of his authority.

The Ottomans, in turn, acknowledged Faisal as ruler of Najd, granting him a title that implied supremacy over Arabia. This settlement restored Saudi rule and stability One of the earliest confrontations of this period occurred in northern Najd, where Saudi authority came into conflict with Kuwaiti forces operating along the fringes of al-Qaryat. Tensions over trade routes Saudi forces engaged and decisively defeated the Kuwaiti contingent at al-Qaryat, forcing their withdrawal

Saudi borders but also discouraged further Kuwaiti intervention in central Arabian affairs during this phase of Faisal's rule At the same time, Faisal ibn Turki consolidated Wahhabi–Saudi control over al-Qassim, a region of immense strategic and economic importance due to its agricultural wealth and position astride caravan routes linking Najd to Iraq and the Hijaz

By the mid-1840s, al-Qassim had become one of the strongest pillars of the revived Saudi state, providing manpower Egyptian forces still operating nominally under Ottoman authority launched punitive Skirmishes aimed at curbing Wahhabi influence preventing the reemergence of Saudi power near the holy cities series of engagements near the Hijazi frontier, Saudi forces suffered a notable defeat at the hands of better-equipped Egyptian troops. These clashes underscored the continued

military superiority of Egyptian regulars Faisal ibn Turki thus maintained a cautious posture toward the Hijaz, focusing instead on internal consolidation and regional dominance within central and eastern Arabia

Faisal ibn Turki and Bahrain conflicts (1847-1851)

By the late 1840s, his attention increasingly turned toward the Persian Gulf, where political fragmentation dynastic rivalries and the growing presence of European powers created both opportunities and constraints In 1847, Faisal sought to exploit these divisions by intervening in Bahraini affairs, hoping to bring the island under Saudi influence without provoking a direct confrontation with external powers the like Omani Empire and Abu Dhabi state This first attempt proved unsuccessful. Although Faisal failed to capture Bahrain outright, he nevertheless secured a peace settlement that obliged the Bahraini ruler to pay tribute to the Saudis His inability to press the campaign further was shaped by several converging factors. Concurrent attacks on al-Qassim by Muhammad bin Awn and Khalid bin Saud diverted Saudi attention and resources, while gaining two victories over al Qassim in Al-Rawḍah Sacking the Town and capturing Manshiyat from the Al Qassim British opposition to any Saudi expansion in the Persian Gulf placed firm limits on Faisal's freedom of action. Britain, whose commercial and strategic interests in the Gulf were substantial, carefully monitored Faisal's movements and openly supported the Bahraini sheikh

Undeterred, Faisal renewed his designs on Bahrain in 1851, launching what would become his third and most serious attempt to assert dominance over the island. In May of that year, he ordered Saudi forces to advance toward al-Bidda in Qatar, which was intended to serve as a forward base for an eventual invasion of Bahrain. This move immediately triggered alarm among Bahrain's leadership. Ali bin Khalifa, the Bahraini representative in Qatar, called upon all able-bodied men to prepare for the

defense of al-Bidda and urgently requested assistance from Saeed bin Tahnun Al Nahyan, the ruler of Abu Dhabi

At the same time, Faisal pursued a broad diplomatic strategy designed to isolate Bahrain and present his campaign as a legitimate intervention rather than an act of aggression. He secured assurances of support from Sultan bin Saqr Al Qasimi of Sharjah and from Maktoum bin Butti bin Suhail of Dubai, worked to ensure the loyalty of local tribes, and promised to restore order and stability to the Gulf. His attempts to enlist the sons of Abdullah bin Ahmad Al Khalifa were likely intended to frame the conflict as an internal family dispute, thereby reducing the likelihood of British interference

Qatari tribes, however, aligned themselves firmly against the Wahhabi advance. They pledged to defend al-Bidda and supplied Ali bin Khalifa with weapons, boats, and fighting men. Their combined forces blockaded Qatif port in an effort to disrupt Faisal's logistics and deter further advances. On 18 May, reports reached the Qatari-Bahraini coalition that Faisal's forces were only two days away from al-Bidda. Alarmed, the allied forces withdrew to Qatar and urgently informed Saeed bin Tahnun, requesting immediate reinforcements.Historical accounts of the ensuing conflict vary considerably, and precise details remain uncertain. All sources agree, however, that fighting began on 2 June 1851 and continued for three days. According to the Wahhabi historian Uthman ibn Bishr, Imam Faisal ordered his son Abdullah to lead a detachment to besiege al-Bidda fortress. Abdullah's forces surrounded the fort, prompting Ali bin Khalifa and his followers to flee by sea to Bahrain, abandoning both the fortress and its munitions. In the aftermath, Qatari leaders appealed to Faisal for peace, claiming they had acted under coercion. Faisal accepted their submission, and they pledged allegiance to him and adherence to Wahhabism By 6 June, Ali bin Khalifa and Saeed bin Tahnun evacuated the fort, abandoning al-Bidda. At this critical moment, Mohammed bin Thani, the sheikh of al-Bidda, shifted his allegiance to Faisal ibn Turki and assisted him in consolidating control

over the region. An oral tradition recorded by Muhammad ibn Ahmad and preserved in Nasser bin Ali Al Thani's Glimpses of Qatari History provides a more detailed local account. According to this narrative, the conflict unfolded over three days. On the first day, the opposing sides exchanged gunfire at a distance without engaging in close combat. On the second day, Qatari forces under Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani fought fiercely against Faisal's troops, while the Bahraini forces withdrew to their ships and observed from offshore. During this fighting, Jassim bin Mohammed personally killed Fares al-Otaibi, a senior Wahhabi officer, in close combat. On the third day, Faisal's forces withdrew to their camp at Mesaimeer.

Following the fighting, Mohammed bin Thani advised Ali bin Khalifa to seek peace with Faisal, warning that the Wahhabis might renew their attack after regrouping. Ali bin Khalifa rejected this counsel, viewing it as an act of betrayal. Shortly thereafter, Mohammed bin Thani independently sent a letter to Faisal requesting peace and agreeing to submit as his subject. Faisal accepted this proposal. On 8 June, Qatari forces seized Burj al-Maah, a watchtower guarding Doha's principal water source near al-Bidda Fort. Upon hearing of this development, Ali bin Khalifa and Saeed bin Tahnun fled to Bahrain without resistance, much to Faisal's frustration, as he reproached Mohammed bin Thani for failing to capture them

The ruler of Bahrain, Muhammad bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, responded by ordering a naval blockade of al-Bidda in June 1851 and dispatching Hamad bin Mohammed Al Khalifa to inform British authorities of his fears of a joint Wahhabi-Qatari invasion. He even expressed willingness to place Bahrain under British protection. Although the British initially rejected this request, further assessment led to a shift in policy. Justin Sheil, a senior British diplomat in Persia, concluded that Wahhabi control over Qatar would endanger British interests by potentially enabling Ottoman expansion into Bahrain On 1 July, Hennell ordered British warships to protect Manama harbor and formally warned Faisal ibn Turki against launching any naval attack on Bahrain. He also addressed a letter to Mohammed bin Thani, explaining that British

intervention was necessary to prevent Ottoman encroachment on the Arabian Peninsula and cautioning him against any move toward the Bahraini coast.

In response, Muhammad bin Khalifa dispatched a naval force of eleven vessels carrying nearly 800 men under Sheikh Ali bin Khalifa to blockade Qatif. This force soon encountered a larger flotilla of eighteen ships manned by Utubi exiles from Qais Island allied with Faisal. In the ensuing naval engagement, the Qais faction suffered heavy losses, including the deaths of Mubarak bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, his brother Rashid, and Bashir bin Rahma, son of the famed Rahmah ibn Jabir al-Jalhami. Casualties among the Qais forces numbered no fewer than 150 men. The death of Mubarak, Faisal's principal ally, forced the Wahhabi leader to reconsider his strategy Abandoning plans for a direct assault on Bahrain, Faisal proposed negotiations on 20 July 1851, offering to send his two brothers and his son to meet Ali bin Khalifa aboard his ship. This overture was rejected outright. Faisal then enlisted Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Sudairi, chief of al-Ahsa, as mediator. Ali bin Khalifa dismissed Sudairi's approach, declaring that he would only receive envoys without conditions. British naval support further emboldened Bahrain's resistance, with warships stationed off al-Bidda to prevent any invasion.

Mediation ultimately succeeded through Saeed bin Tahnun of Abu Dhabi, acting at the request of the Sultan of Muscat and the ruler of Sharjah. Concerned that Faisal's prolonged presence in Qatar threatened the stability of the Trucial Coast, Saeed brokered an agreement by 25 July 1851. The settlement required Sheikh Ali to pay an annual zakat of 4,000 German krones to Faisal, while Faisal agreed to restore al-Bidda Fort to Bahrain and refrain from interference in Qatari affairs or in support of Abdullah bin Ahmad's sons

The agreement, ratified by Muhammad bin Khalifa and accepted by Mohammed bin Thani, brought the crisis to a close. Faisal departed for al-Ahsa on 26 July 1851, Bahrain lifted its blockade of Qatif, and British naval forces withdrew. Al-Bidda's

blockade ended on 2 August. Despite the formal peace, tensions between Najd and Bahrain resurfaced in early 1852, when Muhammad bin Khalifa once again warned British officials that Faisal ibn Turki was preparing a renewed invasion

Faisal ibn Turki Campaign against Omani empire (1851-1853)

the formal division of the Omani Empire would only occur after the death of Said bin Sultan in 1856 Omani ruling elite, coupled with persistent tensions between coastal authorities and the tribal interior, weakened Muscat's ability to defend its frontier regions These divisions created an opening that Faisal ibn Turki was prepared to exploit

to extend Wahhabi religious authority into Ibadi-dominated territory In 1851, Faisal launched a major campaign into Oman, assembling a force composed of seasoned Najdi fighters reinforced by allied tribal contingents from Al-Buraimi, Al-Duru', and the Na'im. This coalition reflected Faisal's broader strategy of combining ideological appeal with tribal pragmatism. While the campaign was framed as an effort to impose Wahhabi doctrine and suppress what the Najdis regarded as religious deviation, it also sought to establish political leverage over Oman's interior and weaken Muscat's control beyond the coast.

Faisal's initial advance focused on the Al-Buraimi oasis, a long-contested frontier zone of immense strategic importance. Control of Al-Buraimi offered access to the interior routes of Oman and influence over the tribes of the region. Saudi forces entered the oasis and clashed with contingents loyal to the rulers of Muscat, gradually asserting dominance through a combination of force, negotiation, and the rallying of sympathetic local tribes. From this forward base, Saudi detachments pushed deeper into Omani territory One of the most significant early engagements occurred near Ibri, where Faisal's forces met and defeated an Omani army

attempting to block the Najdi advance. This victory opened the interior and demonstrated the effectiveness of the Saudi-tribal coalition against Muscat's overstretched forces. The speed of the Saudi advance disrupted Omani defensive efforts As the campaign continued, Faisal's trusted lieutenants led mobile columns across the interior, capturing or neutralizing key strongholds and compelling local tribes to choose between resistance and submission. Areas around Ibri, Rustaq, and Nakhal became focal points of fighting, as Omani forces loyal to the heirs of Said bin Sultan attempted to halt the Wahhabi advance. These engagements were often sharp but localized, with Saudi forces relying on rapid movement, tribal intelligence The decisive phase of the campaign came in 1853, when Faisal moved to consolidate control over Al-Buraimi permanently. Saudi forces expelled remaining Omani loyalists and established a Wahhabi garrison in the oasis, transforming it into a forward stronghold of Najdi authority. This move symbolized the peak of Saudi influence in the region and underscored Faisal's ambition to dominate Oman's interior

Despite these successes, the campaign fell short of achieving complete victory. Faisal did not attempt, nor was he able, to capture Muscat itself. Coastal Oman, supported by maritime strength and external connections, remained beyond Saudi reach. Nevertheless, the campaign succeeded in imposing Saudi dominance over large parts of the Omani interior for several years

Raids on Abu Dhabi

triggers of tension was a defensive and logistical project ordered by Sheikh Saeed bin Tahnoun Al Nahyan, ruler of Abu Dhabi from 1845 to 1855. He ordered the construction of a fortified position intended to serve as the first line of defense for the Al Ain oases and as a rest station along the strategic route connecting Al Ain to Abu Dhabi and the western regions of Al Dhafra and Liwa. This development alarmed the Saudi leadership in Najd, who viewed it as a challenge to their influence

over interior routes and tribal allegiances.In response, Saudi forces dispatched a small detachment to occupy a key water well in the Al Dhafra region, hoping to assert control over the area and disrupt Abu Dhabi's inland communications. Sheikh Saeed bin Tahnoun, supported by warriors of the Bani Yas confederation, reacted swiftly. In a confrontation at Al-Anka, Abu Dhabi's forces decisively defeated the Saudi detachment, forcing it to retreat. News of the defeat deeply angered Imam Faisal bin Turki, but he was unable to respond immediately, as his attention was absorbed by ongoing conflicts involving Oman between 1851 and 1858

By the early 1860s, hostilities resumed with greater intensity. Saudi raiding parties began striking Abu Dhabi's inland territories, testing the defenses of the emirate and attempting to reassert Najdi authority over contested zones. Faisal himself ordered a renewed offensive against Al-Khatim, which was held by the Abu Dhabi commander Khalfan bin Rashid Al-Mazrouei. Despite instructions to halt the Saudi advance, Khalfan was defeated in battle at Al-Khatim, allowing Faisal's forces to claim a clear tactical victory and seize equipment and spoils

Following this success Saudi forces captured to Al-Wathba, increasing pressure on Abu Dhabi's interior defenses. The response was swift. Abu Dhabi retaliated under the leadership of Zayed bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, who would later become the emir's most prominent ruler. Leading his forces personally, Zayed launched an attack on a Saudi military outpost at Shawwalah. The assault succeeded, resulting in the destruction of the outpost and the expulsion of its garrison, restoring Abu Dhabi's position in the area The conflict soon widened. Najdi-led bands pushed westward toward Mirfa and the fishing and pearling anchorages along the Dhafra coast, looting settlements These raids demonstrated the reach of Saudi land forces and their ability to strike deep into coastal hinterlands

By 1862, Imam Faisal intensified the campaign, dispatching reinforcements under his sons and trusted commanders. One notable engagement took place near

Al-Hamriyah, where Saudi-allied Bedouin forces overwhelmed a Sharjawi detachment. Palm groves were burned, and livestock and goods were carried off, underscoring the destructive nature of the inland war and the vulnerability of settled communities beyond the immediate reach of British naval protection.

British officials stationed in the Gulf closely monitored these developments. Their reports frequently referred to "Wahhabi incursions" into the Trucial States, noting that Saudi mobility on land repeatedly undermined the fragile peace established by earlier truces. Although the Royal Navy maintained unquestioned dominance at sea, British authorities found themselves unable to effectively counter Saudi movements in the desert interior. In response, British forces were landed in parts of the Trucial States to reinforce coastal allies and deter further escalation.

In 1863, Saudi raids expanded northward into Ajman and Umm Al-Quwain, targeting oases and settlements loyal to the coastal sheikhdoms. These incursions, however, proved far less successful. The presence of British troops in the region, combined with increased coordination among the Trucial rulers, blunted Saudi advances and imposed new constraints on Najdi operations

Reports reaching Faisal's representatives in Al-Mubarraz from tribal leaders near Abu Dhabi confirmed the growing British military presence. Recognizing the risk of direct confrontation with British power, Faisal ordered the cessation of further raids. This decision marked the effective end of large-scale Saudi offensives against Abu Dhabi and the Trucial Coast during his reign

Although intermittent tensions persisted, the conflict gradually subsided. By the mid-1860s, British influence along the coast and Faisal's own strategic recalculations brought the Saudi–Abu Dhabi struggle to a close

The Saudi Civil war (1865-1875)

As the power of Imam Faisal bin Turki waned in the later years of his reign, unresolved questions of succession fractured the Emirate of Najd and drew the House of Saud into a prolonged civil war Upon the death of Faisal bin Turki in 1865, his eldest son, Abdullah bin Faisal, initially succeeded him as Imam. Abdullah's claim rested on established succession norms and the support of key religious figures in Riyadh. However, his authority was immediately challenged by his younger brother, Saud bin Faisal, who refused to accept Abdullah's leadership and quickly positioned himself as a rival claimant to power Saud proved a formidable opponent. Charismatic, generous with spoils, and skilled at cultivating tribal alliances, he attracted support from a wide range of disaffected groups. Tribes such as the Ajman and Mutair rallied to his cause, along with factions from the Sudair region and urban elements frustrated by Abdullah's governance. Saud's ability to mobilize these forces transformed the succession dispute into a full-scale civil war

A third brother, Abdul Rahman bin Faisal who would later become the last ruler of the Second Saudi State played a significant role in the conflict. Unlike Saud, Abdul Rahman remained loyal to Abdullah and emerged as one of his principal military supporters. He fought alongside his brother in multiple engagements Despite these efforts, the balance of power gradually shifted. By the early 1870s, Saud's forces gained momentum through successive victories. His coalition expanded further as the tribes of Qahtan and elements of the Bani Khalid joined his banner, tipping the military balance decisively in his favor. Abdul Rahman attempted to stem the advance, but his forces lacked the manpower and cohesion necessary to halt Saud's growing dominance

The turning point came in the mid-1870s, when Saud's forces decisively overran the positions held by Abdul Rahman and the loyalists of Abdullah. Najdi accounts describe a chaotic and demoralizing retreat, marked by the collapse of organized

resistance. Riyadh itself became untenable, forcing Abdul Rahman and his supporters to abandon the capital.

The defeat culminated in Abdul Rahman's exile to Ha'il, where he sought refuge under the protection of the Rashidi Emirate. The Rashidis, longstanding rivals of the House of Saud, would later exploit Najdi divisions to expand their influence across central Arabia

Ottoman invasion of al Ahsa (1871)

Several months into his troubled reign, Imam Abdullah bin Faisal sought external assistance to counter the growing power of his brother, Saud bin Faisal, whose control over Al-Ahsa and Qatif posed a direct challenge to Saudi authority. On 29 March 1871, Abdullah dispatched his envoy, Abdul Aziz bin Suwailem, to Medhat Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Baghdad, formally requesting military support against his rival

Saud bin Faisal had by this time entrenched himself in eastern Arabia, having wrested Al-Ahsa and Qatif from Abdullah's control. For the Ottoman authorities, the appeal presented an opportunity to reassert imperial influence along the Persian Gulf and to intervene decisively in Najdi affairs

The Ottoman expedition departed Basra on 20 April 1871. The force was substantial and carefully organized, consisting of five infantry columns, a cavalry division, and artillery units under the command of Lieutenant General Naser Pasha. Accompanying the regular troops was Sheikh of Al-Muntafiq, who led approximately 1,000 volunteer horsemen from his tribe. Additional contingents drawn from various Iraqi tribes assembled in the town of Az Zubayr, swelling the ranks of the expedition. Among those attached to the campaign was Muhammad Saeed Effendi, son of the captain of supervision in Basra, who joined the commander during the march

The expedition also enjoyed significant naval support. The ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Abdullah II Al-Sabah, personally led a fleet of eighty ships in support of the Ottoman operation. The Kuwaiti flotilla sailed down the Gulf and reached Ras Tanura on 13 May 1871, coordinating its arrival with the advance of Ottoman infantry columns marching overland toward Al-Ahsa

From Ras Tanura, Ottoman forces moved south toward Qatif, where they encountered determined resistance from the supporters of Saud bin Faisal. Fierce engagements followed, but the superior firepower and organization of the expeditionary force proved decisive. Qatif fell to Ottoman control on 3 June 1871. With Qatif secured, the campaign pressed onward, advancing through Dammam and ultimately toward Hofuf, consolidating Ottoman dominance over the region

In the aftermath of the conquest, Medhat Pasha abandoned his earlier assurances to Imam Abdullah bin Faisal. Rather than restoring Al-Ahsa to Saudi authority, the Ottomans formally separated the province from the Second Saudi State. Al-Ahsa was reincorporated into the Ottoman Empire and reorganized as the Najd Sanjak, marking a decisive end to Saudi control over eastern Arabia

As a reward for his vital contribution to the expedition, Sheikh Abdullah II Al-Sabah of Kuwait was granted the Ottoman honorific title of Kaymakam, further strengthening Kuwait’s position within the imperial system